

## MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Plans for Updating the Air Quality Index to Reflect New PM<sub>2.5</sub> Standards

FROM: Stephen D. Page, Director  
Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards (C404-04)

TO: Regional Air Directors

Since EPA revised the particulate matter (PM) National Ambient Air Quality Standards in September, a number of you have raised questions about updates to the Air Quality Index (AQI) and changes to air quality forecasting guidelines. The purpose of this memo is to address both of these issues.

AQI reporting is a regulatory requirement (40 CFR Part 58 Appendix G) and any update requires EPA to go through the formal rulemaking process. OAQPS has already begun the process to change AQI reporting requirements to reflect the changes to the PM standards. Until the Agency issues a final revised PM<sub>2.5</sub> AQI, however, affected state and local air quality agencies must continue to comply with current reporting requirements.

While states must continue to report air quality under the current requirements, OAQPS recognizes that action day criteria are voluntary; state, local and tribal air quality agencies always have had the authority to set levels and responses that they determine are appropriate for the particular local conditions. We agree that action day thresholds that are tied to the former 24-hour PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard are clearly no longer adequate and encourage air quality agencies to consider making appropriate changes to their action day levels for the coming winter months.

The AQI is one of EPA's most successful public outreach tools, in part because it provides a consistent reporting mechanism for agencies across the United States. It is important that state, local and tribal agencies continue to use the current AQI for reporting purposes until we complete the formal rulemaking process.

OAQPS plans to issue a notice by January 2007 that outlines our intent to revise PM<sub>2.5</sub> AQI. We plan to discuss these potential changes at our National Air Quality Conference, February 11-14, 2007, in Orlando, Florida. We will also hold stakeholder discussions through other venues, including teleconferences sponsored by the National Association of Clean Air Agencies and others. Once we get stakeholder feedback, we will develop a formal proposal to change the AQI requirements for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. That proposal will be published in the Federal Register and subject to public comment.

Please forward this information to your state, local and tribal air directors. If you have any questions regarding this guidance, please do not hesitate to contact Susan Stone

(919-541-1146) or Chet Wayland (919-541-4603) in my office. Thank you for your efforts in supporting this important public outreach program.

cc: OAQPS Division Directors

Karen Martin (C504-06)

Phil Dickerson (C404-07)

Phil Lorang (C304-06)

Regional AQI Contacts:

Region 1 - Anne Arnold

Region 2 - Bob Kelly

Region 9 - Carol Bohnenkamp

Region 7 - Heather Hamilton

Region 6 - Jan-h Moneysmith

Region 5 - Todd Ellsworth